

NEWTON FAIR HOUSING COMMITTEE

Newton Housing & Community Development Program
1000 Commonwealth Avenue Newton, MA 02459. Phone 617-796-1156. TDD/TTY 617-796-7089

May 5, 2010 Meeting Minutes

Fair Housing Committee members in attendance: Sheila Mondshein (Chair), Phil Herr, Henry Korman, Josephine McNeil, Susan Paley, Girard Plante, Esther Schlorholtz

Staff: Robert Muollo, Jr., Trisha Guditiz

The meeting began at 8:07 a.m.

1. Review and approval of March and April minutes

A Motion was made and seconded. The committee approved the March and April minutes as presented.

2. Status report (architectural access consultant RFP; city personnel changes involving fair housing; FHC membership; and airing of fair housing TV program)

Regarding the access consultant RFP, Trisha informed the FHC that the RFP has been sent out to potential bidders. The deadline for response is May 28th and the work plan is scheduled to begin on June 1st.

Regarding FHC membership, Staff explained that the Executive Office is working to restructure the orientation and recruitment process for all of the City's committees, boards, and commissions. This has inadvertently slowed the process of appointing new members to the Fair Housing Committee. Staff will continue to follow up with the Executive Office to ensure recommended new members are appointed.

Regarding personnel changes in the City, Sheila was concerned regarding the possible impacts that the loss of the City's ADA Coordinator and staff to the Newton Human Rights Commission Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities (MCPD) would have on many of the City's fair housing efforts and protocols, such as intake for fair housing complaints to the Human Rights Commission. Girard echoed this point, stating that the MCPD is also concerned as to who will fill these roles. Trisha explained that Kathleen Cahill of the Housing and Community Development Division has accepted the role as the City's interim ADA Coordinator. Trisha will assume the responsibility of fielding fair housing complaints at the initial stage. The FHC agreed that the results of

the architectural access consultant process may reinforce the importance of having a time-dedicated ADA Coordinator in the City.

Josephine believed that the City should fund the ADA Coordinator position from the City budget, not from CDBG funding, as the position of ADA Coordinator is required regardless of whether the City received federal funding. Josephine explained that if City funds were used to fund this position that additional CDBG funds would be available for other purposes.

Trisha suggested that the Director of Health and Human Services, staff to the HRC and MCPD now fall under, attend a FHC meeting to gain a better understanding of the fair housing implications these individuals have for fair housing efforts in the City.

3. Discussion on fair housing training and education programs

Sheila indicated that the FHC should start the discussion of trainings for City housing officials, decision makers and various City boards and committees. Sheila asked the FHC who should be trained as well as what topics should consist of. Susan suggested that trainings should be held in the fall. Henry stated that HUD is in the process of rewriting their affirmatively furthering fair housing regulations and although there is no timetable for release this may affect the timing and topics of the trainings. Josephine stated that it is important that the trainings be structured according to each audience and suggested that a task force form to strategize about how to proceed.

4. Discussion of final Analysis of Impediments draft

Robert asked the FHC what their recommendations were for the FY11-15 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice. The FHC agreed that the recommendations found in the Newton Fair Housing Action Plan were their recommendations for the FY11-15 AI.

Concern was raised regarding why the “Guidelines for Uniform Local Resident Selection Preferences in Affordable Housing,” created by the Fair Housing Task Force in 2008 had not been implemented throughout the City’s housing programs. The FHC suggested that staff present a matrix at the next meeting showing each of the City’s housing programs, the current local preference policy of each program, and what it will take to adopt the Uniform Local Resident Selection Preference policy in each program.

5. Update on Section 8 landlord program

Robert updated the FHC on the effort to hold a fair housing and resource event for landlords, which would focus on debunking the myths of the Section 8 program and create the opportunity for landlords to connect with Section 8 housing voucher holders.

The event would also include resources for landlords, such as information on small grant and loan programs for lead abatement and accessibility improvements. Robert stated that the event requires an extensive planning process. The task force working on the event, which includes the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership, The Second Step, the Newton Housing Authority, and CAN-DO, will meet again to further discuss outreach strategies and details of the event. The event is scheduled for late August or early September. Henry suggested that the upcoming Landlord event be included in the FY11-15 Analysis of Impediments as an effort to affirmatively further fair housing in Newton.

6. Outstanding questions (Role of FHC in handling reasonable accommodation appeals; possible revisions to local resident selection preference guidelines; neighborhood notification requirements question)

Regarding the role of the FHC in handling reasonable accommodation/modification appeals, Sheila reported that based on her discussion with the City Law Department, for the FHC to handle such appeals it would require a change in the Mayor's Order establishing the FHC.

The FHC decided that CAN-DO should revise its reasonable accommodations / modifications plan to adhere to existing City procedures and not create an additional process. It was recommended that CAN-DO advise tenants who are dissatisfied with a reasonable accommodation/modification decision that they may file a complaint of housing discrimination with the Human Rights Commission or directly to HUD or MCAD.

Robert reported that the neighborhood notification requirements of the City's CDBG 1-4 Unit Purchase Rehabilitation Program, which currently requires recipients of such funds to notify Ward Aldermen and abutting neighbors of the project, is a policy of the Housing and Community Development Division and not a requirement of HUD. This question of local policy and any fair housing implications it may have will be discussed at a future FHC meeting.

Sheila reported that the letter of the FHC's support of Chapter 40B was sent to the coalition against the appeal of Chapter 40B, within the advice provided by the City's Law Department.

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 a.m.